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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether certain interviewer variables affected the amount of trust present in an interview situation. The design of the experiment was based on five groups: four experimental cells and one control cell. Each experimental cell was composed of six male and six female subjects. The control cell contained 26 female and 27 male subjects. The method and procedure of the study involved four steps: (1) using a modification of the Potter Interpersonal Trust Test to establish target-person demands, (2) preparing specific questions to determine the direction of the interview, (3) obtaining a standard norm by using the control cell, and (4) developing the experimental cells by alternating the subject-interviewer situation (i.e., No Touch-No Talk, Touch-No Talk, No Touch-Talk, Touch-Talk) and then recording the results on a table. The results indicate that the significant difference occurs most frequently in comparisons made with both touch and talk. The table shows that as the variables of touch and talk were incorporated, and the more the interviewer participated, the more trust the subjects developed toward the interviewer. (TS)

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UNDERSTANDING CERTAIN INTERVIEWER VARIABLES AFFECTING TRUST IN AN INTERVIEW

Karen J. Gritzmacher

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Interpersonal communication is concerned with the transfer of information between people. Such information is interpreted both verbally and nonverbally. There are numerous interpersonal situations which may affect the type of information to be transferred, and the interpretation of the information may have more impact on an individual in some interpersonal situations than in others.

The interview situation is a good example of interpersonal communication where verbal and nonverbal information transfer may have a significant impact on an individual. It is important to study the interview situation because of the significance it can hold for every individual sometime in his life. All individuals will encounter an occupational or medical interview sometime in their lives. The information transfer under such conditions may have great significance.

Unfortunately, the common interview experience is not well understood. Kahn and Cannell believe that we must learn about the forces which comprise the psychological field of the interviewer and the respondent.[1] The study of sensitizing ourselves to the verbal and nonverbal components which influence the type of information exchanged in the interview is essential.

As noted previously, the type of interpersonal situation may determine the information to be transferred. For example, in every interview there is a certain amount of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is very pertinent, yet it is sometimes very difficult to achieve in an interview. Usually self-disclosure is influenced by trust in the relationship. Trust is generally established between people over a long period of time; yet in most interview situations, people are meeting for the first time. Therefore, although trust is a definite factor in opening or closing an individual and obtaining information, and is difficult to establish, it must be established. "Little happens in a relationship until the individuals learn to trust each other."[2] It is believed that the more the verbal and nonverbal components are understood in the situation, the more open the communication transfer will be. A more successful and desirable flow of communication follows when the individuals have attained a level of trust.

It is the purpose of this essay to report on a study which was undertaken to determine whether certain interviewer variables affected the amount of trust present in an interview situation. Certain interviewer variables were operationally defined as the physical distance between interviewer and subject and verbal disclosure by the interviewer.

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Subjects

The design of the experiment was based on five groups. There were four experimental cells and one control cell. Each experimental cell was composed of six male and six female subjects. The control cell contained 26 female and 27 male subjects. All subjects were selected at random from basic Speech courses.

Method and Procedure

The first step in the study was to develop a measure of trust. Julian B. Rotter had constructed an additive test for interpersonal trust. He selected items for the trust test from a wide range of beliefs which dealt with personal interaction. Specific target-person questions were selected. In addition, other items of general effectiveness to the subject's life were selected: teachers, students, judges, politicians, and society. The test was structured in the Likert-format: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Moderately Agree, (3) Agree and Disagree Equally, (4) Mildly Disagree, and (5) Strongly Disagree.

A modification of the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Test was necessary in order to meet the target-person demands of this study. It was the purpose of this study to investigate the effects of interviewer variables in the interview situation. Since Rotter directed his statements to parents and teachers, etc. as target-person, there was no direct relationship established between the trust measure and the trust toward the interviewer. The researcher analyzed the test and selected the fourteen items which allowed the interviewer to serve as the target-person. The total trust score was determined the same way as the original Rotter Interpersonal Trust Test. The rationale behind the modification was to show that any significant differences wich occurred in each cell of the experiment would be based on interviewer variables.

The next step of the study was to determine the direction of the interview. Sidney Jourard and Robert Friedman had done a study on self-disclosure and trust.[3] The Jourard and Friedman study appeared to be the most practical design based on research facilities. Due to time limitations, the entire Jourard and Friedman study could not be replicated. However, their basic experimental situations were used in conjunction with the modification of the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Test to determine whether certain interviewer variables affect the interview situation.

The researcher selected four of the ten questions from the Jourard and Friedman study. These questions were selected in increasing levels of intimacy. The questions ranged from very general to very personal. The four questions in order of presentation were: (1) what are your hobbies? How do you best like to spend your spare time? (2) what are your personal religious views and the nature of your religios participation, if any? (3) what are the actions you most regret doing in your life and why? (4) what are your most guilty secrets?

The third step of the study was to obtain a standard norm. This cell was referred to as the control cell or Cell 5. The experimenter entered four classrooms of basic Speech courses and gave directions to students on filling out the modified Rotter Interpersonal Trust Test. The students were told to

assume the experimenter was the interviewer in any questions pertaining to interviewer. There was no unnecessary verbal interaction. The interviewer left the room while the students filled out the test. This was the only contact this cell had with the interviewer.

The fourth step of the study was to develop the four experimental cells. Cell 1 had a secretary bring the subject to the room. The subject was asked to be seated by the experimenter who then proceeded to sit directly across from the subject. The subject answered the four questions in order by first reading the questions out loud and then responding. The only response to the answers from the experimenter was listening.

In Cell 2, the experimenter greeted the subject in the hall and led the subject into the room. After entering the room, the experimenter guided the subject to a chair by placing her hand on the back of the subject. The procedure for questions and responses was identical to Cell 1. After the interview the experimenter shook hands with the subject.

In Cell 3, once again a secretary brought the subject to the room. After the subject was seated, the experimenter gave a three minute disclosure of her ideas on professional plans, academic interest, and some personal opinions. None of the personal opinions expressed by the experimenter was directly related to the subject's questions. The experimenter explained to the subject that she was expressing her views because she could not speak during the interview itself yet wanted the subject to know something about her. The subject was then presented the questions in the same manner as Cells 1 and 2. There was no physical contact between the subject and experimenter.

In Cell 4, the experimenter greeted the subject in the hall and led him to a chair as in Cell 2. Then, before the subject began answering questions, the experimenter expressed the identical personal views as in Cell 3. After the interview, the experimenter and subject shook hands just as in Cell 2.

In all cells, there was no time limit placed on subject responses. After each interview the subject was requested to complete the modified Rotter Interpersonal Trust measure. The experimenter left the room while the subject filled out the measure. The study results were based on cell comparisons.

Results

The statistical analysis of the data was performed according to a simple t-test. The t-test was selected because of its ability to measure cell differences despite the limited statistical background of the researcher. The following results were obtained:

TRUST TO INTERVIEWER SCORES

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Cells Compared*		1st Cell Mean	2nd Cell Mean	Degree of Freedom	t-Value Sig. at .05
Cell 1: No Touch- No Talk					
1	2	44.0	43.4	22	
1	3	44.0	50.5	22	
1	4	44.0	54.8	22	2.72
1	5	44.0	43.7	63	
Cell 2: Touch - No Talk					
2	1	43.4	44.0	22	
2	3	43.4	50.5	22	
2	4	43.4	54.8	22	3.04
2	5	43.4	43.7	63	
Cell 3: No Touch - Talk					
3	1	50.5	44.0	22	
3	2	50.5	43.4	22	
3	4	50.5	54.8	22	
3	5	50.5	43.7	63	3.03
Cell 4: Touch - Talk					
4	1	54.8	44.0	22	2.72
4	2	54.8	43.4	22	3.04
4	3	54.8	50.5	22	
4	5	54.8	43.7	63	5.14
Cell 5: Control					
5	1	43.7	44.0	63	
5	2	43.7	43.4	63	
5	3	43.7	50.5	63	3.03
5	4	43.7	54.8	63	5.14
Other Comparisons					
(1 & 2)	(3 & 4)	43.6	52.7	46	3.32
5	(1 & 2)	43.7	43.6	75	
5	(3 & 4)	43.7	52.7	75	4.98
5	(1 & 4)	43.7	48.2	99	2.88

* Cell 1: No Touch - No Talk
Cell 2: Touch - No Talk
Cell 3: No Touch - Talk
Cell 4: Touch - Talk
Cell 5: Control

Discussion

An analysis of the results indicates that the significant difference occurred most frequently in comparisons made with both touch and talk. The table shows that as the variables of touch and talk were incorporated, more trust was apparently placed in the interviewer.

Cell 1 was the No Touch - No Talk cell. The only significant difference which occurred in level of trust in comparison with this cell occurred in Cell 4 which combined touch and talk. This appears critical because it shows that when both interviewer variables were combined, the level of trust toward the interviewer increased.

The findings of Cell 2 are similar to Cell 1. There is a significant difference between Cell 2, Touch- No Talk, and Cell 4, Touch - Talk. There is a general tendency for the level of trust to increase relative to Cell 1; however, it is not significant. It appears that as the experimenter reveals information about herself, there is a tendency for trust to increase toward the interviewer.

In comparing Cell 3 with other cells, the only significant difference in interviewer trust occurs between Cell 3, No Touch - Talk, and Cell 5, the Control cell. We can see that trust definitely increased when the interviewer revealed information about herself relative to the very limited interviewer contact in the Control cell. In the Control cell subjects did not participate in an interview; rather, they were simply told to assume that the experimenter was an interviewer. It appears that interviewer verbal interaction is a more important variable than touching behavior relative to the ability to increase trust directed toward the interviewer.

The results of Cell 4, Touch - Talk, show the highest scores relative to the establishment of trust toward the interviewer. Both variables were combined in this cell allowing for the greatest flow of information between subject and interviewer of any cell. Cell 4 trust levels were significantly higher than Cells 5, 1, and 2. These results are interesting because in Cells 5, 1, and 2 there was little interviewer verbal interaction. When comparing these cells to Cell 4 where the interviewer both touched the subject and revealed personal information, a definite increase in trust appeared. The communication apparently was more open in Cell 4 and trust levels directed toward the interviewer increased. These findings are essential for answering the research question. We find that when touch and talk are combined and incorporated in an interview, trust does significantly increase.

No significant differences were found between the Control cell and Cells 1 and 2. This finding is consistent with the other research findings. These cells have little interaction and thus their scores would tend to be very close. However, in comparing the Control cell to Cells 3 and 4, we find a significant difference. The touch and verbal expressing by the interviewer did increase trust significantly in this comparison.

Finally, significant differences were found when comparing the Control cell to a combination of the other four cells. These are apparently caused by the fact that the Control cell had no interviewer interaction and Cells 1, 2, 3, and 4 had a progression of interviewer interaction up to the fourth cell. It

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does appear that as the interviewer participates more in the interview, the trust level relative to the feelings about the interviewer increases.

The findings show that as the interviewer reveals verbal information as in Cell 3 and as the interviewer touches and reveals information as in Cell 4, the trust present in the situation increases. The more the interviewer participates, the more trust the subject develops toward the interviewer.

FOOTNOTES

1. Kahn, Robert L. and Cannell, Charles F. The Dynamics of Interviewing. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1957, p. 20.

2. Johnson, David W. Reaching Out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self Actualization. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972, p. 43.

3. Jourard, Sidney M. and Friedman, Robert. "Experimenter-Subject Distance and Self-Disclosure," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, XV (1970), 278-282.